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WHIRRAKEE

May 2012

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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Syllabus organiser	Ben Goonan	
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Whirrakee mailing coordinator	Rod Orr	5443 5668

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner.

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Fauna Study Group: Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)
Regular fauna excursions take place most Fridays. See page 11 for details.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188.
To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 33, No. 4, May 2012
Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
What is going on with the flowering times? Before sending this issue to the printery, I saw quite a few Bendigo Wax plants as well as some Gorse Bitter Pea in flower; the Spreading Wattle also seemed to have come out earlier than it should be. Are flowering times extending or shifting? If either of these perceived phenomena are actually real (how could you measure this with any confidence?) what are the long-term consequences? These are burning issues, staring us in the face.

Front page photographer and author: Rod Orr
This photo was taken in the Kairn Road area during our Wattle spotting activity with the Family Nature Club ('Wattle we do now?'). As usual with this group of keen-eyed people, many other interesting creatures, rocks and plants were also noticed. This specimen, probably a Geometrid Moth larva, took some finding because it blended in so well, but it made the mistake of moving and was noticed immediately. During the time that we examined it and took its photo, it moved continuously and continued eating the stamens of the wattle flower. The answer to the question 'Why is the larva the same colour as the flowers of the Spreading Wattle?' was given very neatly by a parent - 'What colour would you expect to be if you ate only Broccoli?' No further questions!
(There is a smaller version of this photo in the colour photo section to prove the great camouflage).

Short Notices

2012 Excursion Program

In May we will have the second of our 'practice excursions' for the SEANA Camp in August. For the others, see page 10. *Please note, for the excursions beyond the next month some details may change, so check with your latest* Whirrakee.

Saturday May 19 1:30 pm - 4:30 pm
Focus: Bats and Boxes
Venue: The Fernery, Rosalind Park, then travel to Number 7 Park, Kangaroo Flat
Leader: Kerrie Norris
Meeting point: Bendigo Field Naturalists' Clubrooms, Old High St. Golden Square
Bring: binoculars. **Contact person:** Jan Orr, 54435668 r.orr@westnet.com.au

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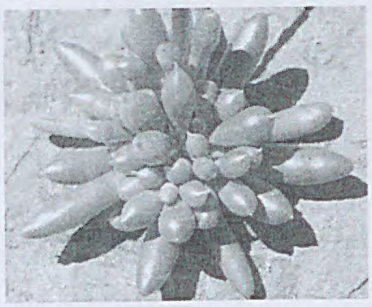
Upcoming general meeting in May… 'Australian and local succulent plants ' Speaker: Attila Kapitany

Enjoy a colourful visual tour of lesser known and intriguing Australian native plants some of which are rare and very unusual.
This talk will cover about one hundred of the approximately 400 plants in Australia that are considered succulent, and will touch on some traditional and modern foods, supply and availability, cultivation, conservation and other points of interest. Included are some of the most under-appreciated, diverse, and interesting of Australian plants. The fact that many of them are among the most drought or dry tolerant of all plants, helps link them all together, along with their obvious succulence. Books and a very large range of succulents will be on sale. Books can be autographed and will be on sale at discounted prices. **Bring your problems, plants or questions along.**



If you like plants, nature & gardening you will enjoy this presentation.
← Photo supplied by A. Kapitany

'Burning the Bush', a letter by Jan Orr recently published in the 'Age'

Dr Robyn Ballinger's article in last Friday's (13.4.2012) Opinion Page clearly outlines the stupid destructiveness of the large scale 'asset protection' burning to Victoria's Box-ironbark forests currently being carried out by the DSE. Bendigo still proudly calls itself "A City in a Forest" however I'm dismayed that our forests are no longer considered to be an asset in themselves but a 'fuel load' that threatens private property. The fact that Bendigo has no history of wild fire is being ignored. All recorded forest fires around Bendigo have been deliberately or accidentally lit by people and have been quickly contained with minimal loss to private property. Bendigo's Black Saturday fire was the result of arson and confined to the urban area. It was not a forest fire. Bendigo's forests cover flat and undulating land that was worked over during the gold rushes. They are criss-crossed with well maintained forest roads that provide very good access for large vehicles, even fire trucks. So why is so much money and effort being spent at this time on 'asset protecting' assets that are most unlikely to be threatened by a bushfire? The answer is, that fires in Bendigo's forests are easier to access and control. The subsequent loss of plant and animal species that cannot cope with fire has not been considered, and ultimately we all will be the poorer for it. The worst of the Black Saturday fires occurred in the wet stringybark and mountain forests of the Great Dividing Range and its foothills. Will burning Bendigo's forests make the people living in these areas safer? Of course not, but it will allow the DSE to claim that they have fulfilled their obligations to the Government and have completed the required amount of burning as set out by the Bushfires Royal Commission. The fuel reduction recommendations from this commission will bring about the destruction of the rich biodiversity of our native forests. However, alas – for all who live in the leafy foothills of the Great Dividing Range, burning Bendigo's forests cannot prevent a calamity like Black Saturday recurring.
There must be a more effective use for the enormous amount of taxpayers' money being spent on this fruitless exercise. We need better organisation and equipment for fire fighting and the replacement of the thousands of old 'earth-return' powerlines with a modern system that doesn't start fires when the poles are damaged.

Janice Orr
Bendigo,Victoria

It's fungi season. Even though autumn so far has been very dry, some interesting fungi have been spotted by our ever-vigilant members. The top 3 on this page have been photographed by J. Clusker

↑ *Amanita phalloides*, the Death Cap, was found at Castlemaine Botanical Gardens a month ago.

Yellow Stainers *(Agaricus xanthodermus)* ↑ look very like the common field mushroom but will make you very sick if eaten.
(seen about 2 months ago at the club rooms)

← *Gymnopilus junonius* at Strathfieldsaye at the base of a tree; it is very common at this time of the year.

Matthew Comer found the beautiful fungus below, *Podoscypha petalodes,* growing in the Pioneer Road area of the National Park and took Jan and Rod Orr out to take this photo on April 5. It's one of the thin, leathery fungi and grows from an underground attachment to wood, probably tree roots, which have become infected by spores.

The mosquitos were fierce, but they persisted and took a couple of photos, however Rod didn't return to try and identify the tiny, thin white, objects in/on the fungi so he doesn't know whether they were another fungus or something else, perhaps the stamens of flowering eucalypts?

Boletes of Bendigo photographed by Rod Orr

This large un-named fungus appeared near Dianne Davies' dam early in April, in very photogenic clumps, which were greatly appreciated by a small number of Field Nats who saw them in good condition soon after they had emerged. Rod is working at finding a name for it, see page 10.

They were very large, ~27cm diameter when fully expanded and more than 20 cm tall. The specimen that Rod sampled for a spore print was smaller than this but surprisingly heavy - it weighed in at 650g.

Another Bolete, seen April 8 on the Mt Alexander (Leanganook Walking Track), about 10cm in diameter. Notice the pale blue stain where the stem had been damaged by slugs and snails. Some older specimens, were hollow with maggots inside.

Even though it wasn't fully opened, this was still a large specimen, at >20cm diameter. It never developed fully, because the weather dried up during early April. Smaller, less mature fungi can also be seen which hadn't even emerged. These were all attached to each other under the ground and were growing in a clump.

Family Nature club excursion : 'Wattle we do now?' (see page 9 for Rod Orr's summary).
Check out Tamara Marwood's blog of the Family Nature Club activities and photos at:
http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com.au/

Great leaf rubbing was enjoyed by young and old

…but this also looks like fun

Moth Larva continuing to eat the stamens of Spreading Wattle (perhaps not being picked up by birds due to its great camouflage) ↓

Parson's bands (photograph and text by Rod Orr)

Eriochilus cucullatus (actual size of the flower is ~1cm)
The Scientific Name refers to the 'Beautiful Lip' and the 'hooded' flower.

This orchid looks like a strange creature waving its arms, doesn't it? The target for any insect, which becomes interested, is the shining 'mouth' (the flower's stigma) in the middle of the column. An insect of just the right size and shape will disturb the pollen mass hidden under the yellow inverted 'V' just above the stigma and might fertilize this orchid with pollen, if there is any already stuck to its body, or another orchid if it carries pollen away from this visit.

↑

←

Some more graptolite images, this time of the trial SEANA excursion with Phil Dyson (again); See also April *Whirrakee* and Rod's brief report on page 10.
The specimen above looks like that of a fossilised flea, but it is actually just made up of two superimposed graptolites.

Matt Comer found the superb specimen on the left, by carefully splitting a rock.

Out of the armchair and into the wild

by John Lindner

Event:	Waterbird survey and count
Date:	Friday 30 September 2012
Location:	Bendigo Waste Water Treatment Plant, Wallenjoe Road, Epsom
Participants:	Jan Orr, Glenise Moors, Anne Bridley, Jane Cleary, 4 students from a course in Conservation and Land Management at BRIT

After 30 years as a member of the field naturalists club, I still consider myself as no more than a generalist, prone to fits of enthusiasm about some areas of study, considering other topics as just too difficult ("grasses" is the classic I suppose), trying to get a grasp of everything that comes along and overall really quite feeling I need leadership in the field. So for me, being with people with real expertise, enthusiasm and the right tools is the perfect combination. Such an alignment of the planets took place on this occasion.

Actually there was not a great number of waterbirds about, probably due to the abundance of water in the hinterlands of Bendigo. They can always keep this permanent water in reserve I dare say. That made our observations just that much more pertinent. Of course, they were made not only with binoculars, but with the wonderful telescopes which Jan Orr and Glenise Moors had. Without those, it would have been very difficult to see any kind of detail.
So, cutting to the three highlights which I found so interesting.

First, the group of Banded Landrails or Buff banded Rails. We didn't even have to go inside the reserve to see these characters. Four of them were evident in the roadside vegetation beside Wallenjoe Road, about 100metres west of the entry gate to the main pond. There were large pools of water remaining on the road, presumably from a combination of the recent rains or seepage from the very full ponds. At intervals, one would dash across the road, lingering for a while in the open at the other side, before moving into the cover. Then two would meet in the open for a brief skirmish, wings flapping and necks outstretched. This dashing from one side to the other and mutual skirmishing went on for as long as we looked. When the sun catches the patterns and colours of these engaging birds, the effect is quite impressive. I have seen these medium sized rails in some unusual places over the last few unusually wet months, skulking about in vegetation beside cycle/walking tracks at Kennington and even quite near the middle of Bendigo. They seem to be quite nomadic when it comes to opportunities to forage somewhere new.

And what was the real point to us observers of these little events on the road? The birds were doing something, engaging in intriguing behavior. Better than a wildlife documentary on TV. And better was to come.

Secondly, the Musk Ducks. There were quite a few birds counted, about 10, I think. In particular there was a large male with a very prominent throat flap. No sooner had we seen this bird than it began displaying: flattening its body to form a spinal ridge and two wing humps, raising and flicking its stiff-feathered tail, splashing water out to the side, and loudly whistling. It was "steaming" about in a determined way too – one of its other names is Steamer. On the other hand, a nearby female was quite silent, carrying a young one on its back, both apparently semi-submerged. She did not seem to be interested in the male's antics. I don't think anybody had seen a Musk Duck chick before.

Thirdly, the Blue-billed Ducks. Six were seen in the first group, all males. They were alternately swimming out from a point on the island and skirmishing with each other, then disappearing back to the cover of the island. Sometimes they dived beneath the water. After a pause they would repeat this routine of coming out, having a little tussle and

disappearing. Later a pair of these birds was seen on the northern pond (May Swamp) near our old bird-hide. The male was also intent on displaying, flattening and enlarging its body, swimming along partly submerged and erecting its stiff tail feathers. It was a very handsome chestnut brown with an almost black head, depending on the angle of the light. Its bill really was the most astonishing sky blue. By contrast, the female was a speckled brownish-black colour, with only two tail feathers, which looked quite odd. Perhaps the others had been shed. Like the Musk Duck, she did not seem to be affected by the male's display.

Among other water birds seen were Black Duck, Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal (again the colours of the male are quite startling when the sun strikes at the right angle), Little Pied Cormorant and Hoary-headed Grebe. There were many other birds too, but I wasn't keeping a list.

That morning reminded me of when Bev Culvenor took me to Lake Tom Thumb in early November 2011, when I could not drive my car after knee surgery. On that occasion, we were treated to excellent views and behavior, all in the open, of the Spotted Crake, Baillon's Crake and the Buff-banded Rail.

So, to all you armchair naturalists, I can thoroughly recommend these twice-yearly visits to the waste water treatment plant. Water birds make observing easy, and you might see some pretty interesting behavior too.

Wattle we do now?

A report form the April Family Nature Club activity by Rod Orr

We had a small but keen group of Family Nature Club members who were prepared to find out the answers to our question: 'Wattle we do now?' We took this opportunity to move our study site to the One Tree Hill section of the National Park, meeting in Kairn Road to find out what this very interesting part of our forest had to offer us.

Thanks, again, to our willing band of knowledgeable helpers, we managed to discover quite a lot about the wattles and other plants, which were growing there. The children were encouraged to add to their own records by making rubbings of the leaves & phyllodes that we found. Some very good leaf/phyllode rubbings were produced under Jan's guidance.

After a brief talk about which wattles grew here, we then went on a wattle hunt to try and find them, managing a good total of 5 species in just a small area. The children were encouraged to complete a 'Tick' list of the wattles that they found and to write the names of these wattles on the sheet of colour photos that each one had been given (of the wattles of this area which had phyllodes instead of leaves).

We looked for, but didn't have time to find, Black Wattle to examine its leaves (not phyllodes) but had already studied and made rubbings of the 'ferny' leaves of Cootamundra Wattle, which was quite common in this area.

Of course, and as usual with this group of keen-eyed people, many other interesting creatures, rocks and plants were also noticed (see front page photo and accompanying description on page 2)

We had a final brief talk about why wattles were important in our bushland because of their role in Nitrogen fixing, in association with specialised bacteria living in their roots. Everyone had noticed the hard, dry, rocky soil but these plants were doing very well in these conditions because they were able to make their own supplies of nitrogen fertilizer.

The weather was beautiful, the bush was very interesting and attractive and everyone went home knowing a bit more about how to identify wattles even when most of them weren't flowering. Everyone also discovered how to spell 'phyllode' and what it meant.

There are many other very interesting sections of the Greater Bendigo National Park that we will also use in future for our Family Nature Club's activities.

Unknown Bolete...continued from page 5

Unfortunately, we discovered that this fungus is very susceptible to attack by a mould - even though the specimen looked to be in good condition, it started to decompose very rapidly and we failed to get a spore print. In desperation, I sliced up the bolete and selected the least mouldy sections for drying. This seemed to be a success and now the dried slices are packaged up after following the instructions for preserving large fungi. They will be delivered to the FungiMap people at the Herbarium. I've since looked at some of my photos and decided that there I had managed to obtain a partial spore print but all I have now is the photographic record because I threw the damp, stained paper away.

The questions that we have asked so far have reinforced our opinions locally that this bolete is quite different from the Giant Bolete (*Phlebopus marginatus*) that a few of us had seen before in wetter areas than around Bendigo (Mt Alexander and Black Hill) and that, perhaps, it has not been named. Apparently, Australian boletes are very poorly known.

We thought that, because of its striking yellow colour and the 'baked' appearance of the cap we could refer to it as Dianne's Lemon-Meringue Pie Bolete.

We'll have to be patient and wait until next year to sample an uninfected specimen for a spore print. The boletes seem to appear early in the 'Fungus Season' - we missed them last year because we didn't start looking for fungi until after the good rains of May & June, the boletes had disappeared, without trace, well before we started looking.

Excursion Report: Graptolites of Bendigo

On April 14th, a small, but keen group of Bendigo Field Naturalists were taken to one of Bendigo's Graptolite sites in the forest, led by one of our members, Phil Dyson.

This was the first of our trial-run of excursions that we hope to conduct later in the year for the SEANA get-together to be held in Bendigo - we wanted to see whether there was sufficient to occupy our visitors for half a day.

We should never have wasted time worrying about this – it was amazing what we managed to find in just a couple of hours of turning over pieces of Ordovician rock and, sometimes, splitting rocks to see if any fossils were hidden inside (two examples are shown on page 7).

It was obvious that everyone who came on this very interesting excursion to one of Bendigo's special places, was very pleased with the potential for this as a SEANA excursion in August. Jan thanked Phil for conducting the excursion and sharing his expert knowledge with us. (by Rod Orr)

Excursions for June and July...

Please note, for the excursions beyond the next month some details may change, so check with your latest Whirrakee.

Saturday June 16 9:30 am - 4:30 pm
Focus: Botany and birds
Venue: Forests South-east of Bendigo
Leader: Anne Bridley
Meeting point: Bendigo Field Naturalists' Clubrooms, Old High St. Golden Square
Bring: binoculars, lunch, water and clothes for all weathers. **Contact person:** Jan Orr, 54435668 r.orr@westnet.com.au

Saturday July 14 9:30 am - 4:30 pm
Focus: Botany and birds
Venue: Kamarooka **Leader**: Matthew Comer
Meeting point: Bendigo Field Naturalists' Clubrooms, Old High St. Golden Square
Bring: binoculars, lunch, water and clothes for all weathers **Contact person:** Jan Orr, 54435668 r.orr@westnet.com.au

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday, May 9 **7.30pm**
Attilla Kapitany, Australian Succulent Plants, "Australian and local succulent plants"
See description of topic on page 3.

Photo supplied by A. Kapitany

Wednesday June 13 **7.30pm**
David Stewart, Entomological Society of Victoria: "June 2004-June 2012 image records of fauna response to the provision of a permanent water point in a Dry Woodland Fragment"

Club Excursions

Saturday May 19 **1:30 pm - 4:30 pm**
Focus: Bats and Boxes
Venue: The Fernery, Rosalind Park, then travel to Number 7 Park, Kangaroo Flat
Leader: Kerrie Norris
Meeting point: Bendigo Field Naturalists' Clubrooms, Old High St. Golden Square
Bring: binoculars. **Contact person:** Jan Orr, 54435668 r.orr@westnet.com.au

See page 10 for the excursion program until June.

Regular Fauna Excursions

Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30 the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone and go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30, then the excursion is not on.

Family Nature Club

The next activity (on May 20) will involve spotting and identifying fungi. Please register if you are turning up with family, or let Jan and Rod know if you intend to offer assistance.
Check out their 2011 and 2012 activities at http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Owls of the forest

Saturday 19th May, 1.30 - 2.30pm

This presentation will be on three nocturnal species - Tawny frogmouth, Southern boobook and Australian owlet-nightjar. Our guest speaker is Marian Weaving who is a PhD Candidate on the Tawny Frogmouth Project from the School of Life and Environmental Sciences at Deakin University.

Where: Trentham Neighbourhood Centre, High St, Trentham. **Cost:** Gold coin donation on the night. **Bookings:** Trentham Neighbourhood Centre (03) 5424 1354 Email trentham@ourneighbourhood.org.au